Australia-US talks outline accelerated military build-up for war with China

Oscar Grenfell
30 July 2023

Australia-US Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) held in the city of Brisbane on Saturday sketched a further build-up of American military assets and aggressive geo-political activities, all directed against China. The talks provided for an expanded US military presence in Australia, the production and stockpiling of missiles in that country, a secret space warfare pact and the development of a joint intelligence agency.

The Brisbane meeting was the centrepiece of a broader regional visit by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin, which had the character of an anti-China campaign. Both took the unusual step of visiting small countries in the Pacific, which has become a focal point of the US-China tensions, and Blinken travelled to New Zealand, whose commitment to the US war drive has repeatedly come under question.

The AUSMIN statement underscored the far-reaching character of the geopolitical push and accompanying military build-up, as well as the complete commitment to it of the Australian Labor government, represented at the talks by Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Defence Minister Richard Marles.

The communique is concerned not only with the Indo-Pacific, but with the global strategy of American imperialism.

An entire section of the statement was headlined "Shared commitment to global security." It dwelt particularly on the conflict in Ukraine, with bellicose and thoroughly hypocritical condemnations of Russia's violations of peace and international law.

The focus on Ukraine comes amid a continuous escalation of US and NATO involvement in what was a planned and provoked proxy war with Russia. Increasingly, the US attempts to inflict a devastating defeat on Russia and its developing confrontation with China are being linked as two fronts in a single global conflict aimed at establishing US hegemony.

That was underscored by the participation of Australia and other Indo-Pacific allies last month at a NATO summit in Lithuania dedicated to the next US escalation in Ukraine. Notably, the AUSMIN statement "called on all those with influence on Russia, particularly China, to exert it now to end the war." This is a clear attempt to use the war as a means to ramp up pressure on China.

The greater part of the statement was a detailed outline of US strategy in the Indo-Pacific. As always, the attempt to assert untrammelled US dominance was presented as an exercise in ensuring that the region remained "free and open" and subject to the "international rules-based order," a phrase that means the post-World War II "rules" dictated by the US itself.

The statement, while calling for "peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," declared the support of the US and Australia for "emphasised Taiwan's important role as a leading Indo-Pacific economy and democracy and reiterated their commitment to work together to support Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organisations to deepen economic, trade and people-to-people ties and committed to enhance development coordination with Taiwan in the Pacific."

All of that dovetailed with the efforts of the Biden administration to transform the island into a flashpoint for war. Presidents Trump and now Biden have chipped away at the "One China" policy, which the US accepted in 1979 as the basis for diplomatic relations with China, under which the Beijing was recognised de facto as the legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan.

Washington's aim is to goad Beijing into a military conflict over Taiwan as it did with Russia in Ukraine.

The US and Australia expressed "their strong opposition to destabilising actions in the South China Sea, such as unsafe encounters at sea and in the air, the militarisation of disputed features, the dangerous use of coast guard vessels and maritime militia," etc.

All of this was directed against China. In fact, it is the US that has conducted provocative "freedom of navigation" operations in and near waters claimed by Beijing, while stoking regional disputes over the South China Sea that had simmered as low-level conflicts for decades.

The document made similar hypocritical statements about the East China Sea. All of this is part of a vast US-led military build-up aimed at nothing less than the encirclement of China.

Reference was made to the importance of South-East Asian states. They have reacted nervously to the US press against China, especially the announcement that Australia will acquire nuclear-powered submarines under the militarist AUKUS pact with the US and Britain. Nations such as Indonesia also have

© World Socialist Web Site

ties with Russia and have avoided taking a clear position on the Ukraine war.

A major focus of the statement was on the Pacific. The small island states there have become the focal point of a US campaign against purported Chinese influence in the region. This reached its high point last year, when revelations of a security pact between China and the Solomon Islands prompted threats by the US of unspecified military action against that oppressed nation.

The intense US and Australian intervention in the region has been underscored by continuous visits of Australian Foreign Minister Wong, as well as the stopovers of Blinken and Austin.

The statement sketched out an aggressive plan for that region. This included involving the Pacific Island states in military exercises with the US and its allies, deepening the US naval presence there and expanding the diplomatic and intelligence presence.

AUSMIN has underscored Australia's role as a fulcrum of this broader offensive throughout the region.

The sections dealing with US-Australian military cooperation underscored that the AUKUS submarines are only a centrepiece of a far broader build-up which extends across every area of the armed forces. The decisions made were in line with a previous AUKUS meeting last October, at which the Labor government gave a virtually open-ended commitment to the stationing of US military assets in Australia.

This year's statement "recalled the Force Posture Agreement, which recognises the mutual benefits to Australia and the United States from access to facilities and areas in Australia by the United States Armed Forces and that such access and use is on a rotational basis…"

Concretely, it spelt out that the airforce bases in Australia's north are being upgraded, including to host US assets. Last year it was revealed that the Labor government had already committed to the "rotation" of nuclear-capable B-52 bombers through northern Australia. "Rotation" in this context is a euphemism to avoid the term "basing."

The statement said: "Through Enhanced Air Cooperation, they announced their intent to rotate U.S. Navy Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance Aircraft in Australia to enhance regional maritime domain awareness, with an ambition of inviting likeminded partners to participate in the future."

Through "enhanced maritime cooperation," US nuclear-powered submarines will begin "rotating" through the country's bases, particularly the west coast Stirling naval base, to which Washington has sought greater access for years. Well before Australia acquires a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines, it will be a base from which British and US vessels could conduct offensive operations targeting the Chinese coast.

The US and Australian leaders agreed to a deal under which the Biden administration will help develop Australia's missile manufacturing capabilities. Australia will provide the missiles to the US, including to facilitate the US-NATO war effort in Ukraine, and will stockpile them in the country.

The broader focus of the statement was on "supply chain security." In addition to the missile pact, the US and Australia earlier this year signed an agreement integrating their policies on critical minerals. Increasingly, those industries necessary for war production are being fortified and weaned off from their dependence on China for these vital raw materials in preparation for an actual conflict in the region.

The US and Australian officials "declared Enhanced Space Cooperation as a new Force Posture Initiative to enable closer cooperation in this critical operational domain. They also announced their intent to increase space integration and cooperation in existing operations and exercises."

What this concretely means is being hidden from the population. Defence Minister Marles was asked by a journalist if Australia and the US had undertaken to develop space weapons targeting China. He refused to answer, made vague comments about the importance of the program and said it was likely that no Australian government would ever say more on the matter.

Over the past two months, US generals, together with hawkish think-tanks, have increasingly emphasised the importance of space warfare on the pretext of responding to purported threats from Russia and China. The US military has refused to disclose its space weapons systems, but senior figures have declared that America is ready to "fight tonight" in a space war.

In this context, it seems likely that the US-Australian deal could relate to weapons or systems that would be used to destroy Chinese and Russian satellite systems in the event of war.

That only underscores the fact that what is being prepared is a conflict of unprecedented and catastrophic proportions. The Labor government is completing Australia's transformation into a frontline state in such a war.

That is entirely in keeping with the turn by imperialist governments everywhere to militarism to offset their own crisis and to project outwards the immense social tensions that are building up amid a breakdown of capitalism. The fight against war is thus a fight against the Labor government, the capitalist system and its defenders.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site